Doctor *PORTEUS*'s

SERMON

Preached before the HONOURABLE

HOUSE of COMMONS.

Sabbati, 31 *Die Januarii*, 1767.

ORDERED,

THAT the Thanks of this Houſe be given to the Rev. Doctor *Porteus*, for the Sermon preached by him Yeſterday before this Houſe, at Saint *Margaret*'s, *Weſtminſter*, and that he be desired to print the ſame; and that Mr *Robinſon* and Sir *William Maynard* do acquaint him therewith.

T. TYRWHITT,
Cl. Dom. Com.

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A SERMON

Preached before the HONOURABLE

HOUSE of COMMONS,

AT

ST MARGARET's, WESTMINSTER,

ON

FRIDAY, JANUARY XXX, 1767.

BY

BEILBY PORTEUS, *D. D.*

Prebendary of PETERBOROUGH, and

Chaplain to his Grace the Lord Archbiſhop of CANTERBURY.

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M DCC LXVII.

MATTHEW VI. 33.

Seek ye firſt the Kingdom of GOD *and his Righteouſneſs, and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.*

THE *things* here referred to are the neceſſaries and comforts of the preſent life. Theſe, our Saviour aſſures us, provided we make his Religion our firſt and principal concern, ſhall be *added to us*; ſhall be given us over and above what is ſtrictly ſtipulated for by the Covenant of Grace; ſhall follow, either as the natural conſequences of our upright conduct and honeſt induſtry in our reſpective ſtations, or as the reſult of GOD's providential interpoſition in our behalf.

THIS gracious promiſe is juſtly applicable to us, not only in a private capacity as ſeparate individuals, but in a collective one as members of a civil community; and we may draw from it this very important concluſion, that if any people ſeek firſt the Kingdom of GOD and his Righteouſneſs, if it be their firſt care to underſtand thoroughly, to believe ſincerely, and to practiſe conſcientiouſly, the Religion of CHRIST, it will exceedingly facilitate their ſucceſs in all the great objects of civil government, and contribute more

more than any political ſyſtem or expedient whatever to the proſperity, happineſs, and ſtability of the ſtate.

THE natural tendency of the Goſpel, conſidered in itſelf, to produce and to preſerve national felicity, is ſo apparent, that it is now denied by none but thoſe who deny every thing that is obvious to common ſenſe, merely becauſe it is ſo. It is acknowledged, nay aſſerted, in the ſtrongeſt terms by the beſt political writers, and from one of the moſt open and determined enemies of our Faith, it has extorted a confeſſion, that *Conſtantine* acted the part of a ſound politician in giving Chriſtianity a legal eſtabliſhment: "Since "no religion was ever ſo well proportioned, nor ſo well "directed as that of CHRIST ſeemed to be to anſwer the "purpoſes he had in view; that is, to attach the ſubjects "of the empire more firmly to himſelf and his ſucceſſors, "and the ſeveral nations that compoſed it to one another, "by the bonds of a Religion common to all of them; to "ſoften the ferocity of the armies, to reform the licentiouſ-"neſs of the provinces, and by infuſing a ſpirit of moderation "and ſubmiſſion to government, to extinguiſh thoſe prin-"ciples of avarice and ambition, of injuſtice and violence, "by which ſo many factions were formed, and the peace "of the empire was ſo often and ſo fatally broken *." Others have even carried this doctrine ſo far, as to build upon it a conceit, that the Chriſtian Revelation is the invention of human policy; and though their ſuperſtructure

* Lord *Bolingbroke*'s Works, Quarto, vol. iv. p. 433.

is moſt contemptibly weak, yet it ſhews at leaſt their good opinion of the foundation.

So far then as ſpeculation goes, the ſocial temper of Chriſtianity admits of little controverſy. But all theſe fine imaginations, we have been told, are utterly overthrown by experience, and muſt be ranked amongſt thoſe many viſionary ſyſtems with which ingenious men amuſe themſelves in their cloſets, but which upon trial are found to be the wildeſt and moſt romantic things in nature. Had Chriſtianity (ſay ſome of our modern philoſophers) been in reality that mild and benevolent Religion, which in theory it appears to be, in the ſpace of above ſeventeen hundred years, we ſhould certainly have ſeen ſome of its beneficial effects. Whereas, in fact, through all that vaſt tract of time, its progreſs is marked, not by public benefits, but by public calamities; it has been the great bane of civil happineſs, and the grand diſturber of national tranquillity; it has given occaſion to the moſt ſanguinary diſſenſions that ſtain the annals of Hiſtory; and in particular was the chief inſtrument in producing thoſe violent convulſions in our own Iſland, the moſt tragical part of which we are this day aſſembled to deplore.

To ſay nothing of the viſible exaggerations in this heavy charge, let the ſame reaſoning be purſued only one ſtep further, and applied, as it may be with ſingular propriety and redoubled force, to civil ſociety itſelf: let the innumerable inſtances of fraud, rapine, murder, tyranny and oppreſſion,

preſſion, the endleſs diſtractions, wars, revolutions, maſſacres and proſcriptions, which have ariſen from cauſes purely political, be drawn forth to view; and it will appear, that if this be the right way of judging, ſocial union is infinitely more hurtful to mankind, than the Chriſtian Revelation, and that we ſhall never be tolerably happy till we are reduced, not only to the Religion, but to the ſtate, of Nature too. And indeed, they who affirm Chriſtianity to be unſocial, are ſometimes ſo honeſt and conſiſtent as to go through with the argument, and maintain civil eſtabliſhments to be pernicious things †.

But if men think it upon the whole more eligible to remain connected together in artificial ſociety, than to return to the condition of independent ſavages, and are content to bear the temporary and accidental inconveniences of political inſtitutions, for the ſake of the far more numerous, and ſolid, and laſting advantages attending them; it is to be hoped, that the very ſame conſiderations will prevail upon them to eſtimate the utility of Christ's Religion to the public, not from the caſual though frequent abuſes and corruptions of it, but from the natural operation of its genuine doctrines, from the whole amount of the ſubſtantial and permanent benefits, which upon examination it will be found to have conferred upon ſociety.

† See *Diſcours ſur l'Origine & les Fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes*.

But before theſe benefits of Religion are enumerated, it will be proper to conſider how far even the abuſes of it are really chargeable with the miſchiefs aſcribed to it, eſpecially in thoſe inſtances to which the preſent occaſion carries back our thoughts, and which may to ſome perhaps appear to form a very ſtriking objection to the doctrine of the text.

In thoſe unhappy times, it muſt be confeſſed, Eccleſiaſtical and Civil Contentions were ſo confounded together, that it is not eaſy to ſeparate them in contemplation from each other, to diſentangle their complicated effects, and aſſign to each the preciſe ſhare it had in the production of calamities ariſing manifeſtly from the joint agency of both. But it may very ſafely be affirmed, that to repreſent Religious Controverſy as the *original and principal* cauſe of thoſe diſorders, and the political diſputes about Power and Liberty as only *ſubordinate* to them *, is to indulge a ſpleen againſt Religion at the expence of Truth. "By the infuſion of theological hatred," the ſore was not made, but only inflamed; and even then, without the addition of ſome other much more deadly poiſon, it would never have feſtered and become incurable. The truth is, Invaſions of Liberty and Violations of Law firſt gave the wound, Religious Conteſts afterwards widened it, Ambition, Reſentment, Revenge, Conſciouſneſs of Guilt, and Fear of Puniſhment, rankled in it at laſt, and rendered

* *Hume*'s Hiſtory of *England*, Quarto, vol. v. p. 255.

it mortal. To thoſe who conſider the critical ſituation of the Kingdom at the acceſſion of King *Charles* the Firſt, the undefined boundaries of Liberty and Prerogative, and the widely different ſentiments entertained on theſe points by Prince and People; on the one hand, the high notions of regal Power imbibed by the King with his earlieſt prejudices, impreſſed on him by example, and ſeemingly authoriſed by the practice of many preceding reigns; the frequent and oppreſſive exerciſe of this power in the courſe of his own adminiſtration; and, above all, the inclination ſhewn, and the attempts made, not only to exert it occaſionally in caſes of urgent neceſſity, but even to eſtabliſh it into a regular ſyſtem of Government, and fix it on the foundation of Law itſelf: on the other hand, the totally oppoſite idea of the *Engliſh* Conſtitution which had now for ſome time been forming in the minds of the People; the diligent reſearches then made into ancient Statutes and Charters, the conſequent revival of many legal Rights and Privileges, the ſpirit of Liberty kindled in their breaſts by theſe diſcoveries, and ſtill further inflamed by a more general acquaintance with the ſacred Writers and the beſt profane Authors; the wonderful acceſſion of Power in fine lately thrown into their hands by the increaſe of Commerce, the alienation of Lands, and the general diffuſion of Wealth, a power which they now began to feel, and were in truth but too much provoked, as well as too much inclined to exert to the utmoſt; to thoſe, I ſay, who conſider theſe utterly inconſiſtent views and undecided claims of Sovereign and Subject, the intire perſuaſion of their reaſonableneſs

reaſonableneſs on both ſides, and the warmth and vehemence of courſe with which they were reſpectively urged, it will be evident, that had Religion been intirely out of the queſtion, there were grounds enough of diſcord in the Kingdom to throw it into the utmoſt confuſion, and that from the colliſion of ſuch oppoſite pretenſions, the Conſtitution muſt neceſſarily have received ſome very violent ſhock. Accordingly we find, that though theological differences did indeed ſerve to aggravate the diſpute, though the plea of Religion was frequently made uſe of to alarm the fears of the People, to give ſolemnity to trifles, and ſanctity to illegal meaſures; yet the grievances moſt ſeriouſly and frequently complained of by the popular leaders, were haſty Diſſolutions and long Intermiſſions of parliamentary Aſſemblies, tyrannical Courts of Judicature, illegal and burdenſome Taxations, arbitrary and unconſtitutional Trials Impriſonments and Puniſhments, the revival of Monopolies, the exerciſe of martial Law in civil caſes, and the appearance of a concerted deſign to overthrow the fundamental Laws of the Country. In the Petition of Right, not the leaſt mention is made of Religion; the hardſhips enumerated, and the remedies demanded, are wholly of a civil nature: yet this was the time, and this the proper medium for obtaining the Reformation of religious abuſes, if thoſe had been the chief cauſe of the oppoſition made to the Crown. Whereas, from the profound ſilence obſerved on this head, it appeared manifeſtly to be the ſenſe both of Parliament and People, that the moſt crying grievances were redreſſed, and

the moſt oppreſſive extenſions of the Prerogative properly reſtrained. But when, upon ſome freſh acts of violence from the Court, the conteſt was renewed on the other ſide with double vigour, and in a little time every ſecurity obtained againſt any future invaſions of Liberty that could be given, except the intire annihilation of that conſtitutional power in the Crown, without which Liberty itſelf could not long ſubſiſt: and when theſe ample conceſſions, inſtead of appeaſing, ſerved only to inflame, the ruling Demagogues, filled them with ſuch hopes, and opened to them ſuch proſpects, as at firſt probably never preſented themſelves to their minds, intirely changed the whole ſtate of the diſpute, and, from Patrons of Liberty, converted them into Oppreſſors of it: then the cry of Religion grew ſtronger in proportion as it became more neceſſary to veil their real motives, and it was quickly loaded with the chief guilt of tranſactions, in which it bore but a very inconſiderable part. Even the two moſt notorious outrages of puritanical zeal, the excluſion of the Biſhops from Parliament, and the expulſion of the Epiſcopal Clergy from their Benefices, proceeded as much from views of Intereſt and Ambition, as from the rigours of the new Eccleſiaſtical Diſcipline: and in all the ſubſequent iniquities of the diſcontented faction, though the fervors of Enthuſiaſm mingled themſelves in every civil and military operation, and the moſt execrable enormities were committed in the name of the LORD; yet with all this, there was ſo much larger a proportion of barefaced Hypocriſy and impious Grimace in the compoſition

of

of the leading Characters amongſt them, as renders it highly probable, that even erroneous principles of Religion had almoſt as little concern in the horrid termination, as in the original production of the civil diſorders.

But whatever degree of blame be thought due at laſt to the Religion of the times, the Religion of Christ has certainly no part of thoſe miſchiefs to anſwer for, nor do the diſtractions of that period afford the leaſt ground for imputing to it a malignant influence upon the State. That it ſtands intirely clear of all ſuch guilt, will be evident from this ſingle conſideration, that it is charged at the ſame time with two oppoſite and inconſiſtent crimes, with having favoured Deſpotiſm on the one hand, and encouraged Rebellion on the other. The two accuſations manifeſtly deſtroy each other. If its principles oblige men to ſubmit patiently to the moſt tyrannical Government, they cannot certainly allow them to reſiſt, much leſs to overthrow, any Government. The natural and juſt concluſion is, that the Goſpel encourages neither Tyranny nor Anarchy; that theſe two oppoſite corruptions of civil Government correſpond exactly to the two great corruptions of Religion, Superſtition and Enthuſiaſm; while true Chriſtianity and true Liberty, which occupy the middle point betwixt theſe their reſpective extremes naturally coincide with, and mutually ſupport, each other.

It was not moſt aſſuredly by ſeeking *too earneſtly* the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs, that our Anceſtors were plunged into the horrors of a civil War, but by not ſeeking them *earneſtly enough*; by not ſeeking them in the firſt place, in preference to all ſelfiſh deſires and worldly purſuits; by not ſearching carefully into the true ſpirit of the Goſpel, and conforming to it ſincerely and uniformly throughout; by not making it the ſupreme guide of their actions, and bringing into captivity to it every turbulent deſire, every aſpiring thought, the viſions of Fanaticiſm, and the prejudices of Superſtition. Nothing can be more clear, than that if the contending parties had thus known Christ and thus obeyed Him, the commotions they raiſed would have been ſtifled in their birth or checked in their progreſs, and the miſeries of the Nation either wholly prevented, or very conſiderably alleviated.

That the unfortunate Monarch had the intereſts of Religion ſincerely at heart, and regulated by its holy precepts the general tenor of his private life, is unqueſtionable; but in public affairs, his zeal was in ſome inſtances without knowledge, and his paſſions (and ſtill more thoſe of his adviſers) frequently without due controll. From theſe unhappy defects (which a more perfect inſight into the true nature, and a more exact obedience to the laws of the Goſpel, would have remedied, and in the latter part of his life actually did remedy) aroſe thoſe haſty and violent reſolutions, thoſe intemperate and ill-timed acts of power,

power, that firſt led the way to his deſtruction: and to a total violation of every rule of Chriſtian Charity and Chriſtian Juſtice, to the moſt ſhameful mockery of that HOLY SPIRIT with which they pretended to be inſpired, were owing thoſe laſt outrageous violences of the diſaffected party, which ſtamped on them the indelible infamy of having invented a new ſpecies of Guilt, of having deſtroyed their Sovereign by a judicial proceſs, for the ſuſpicion of crimes which they themſelves, and they only, had actually perpetrated; of having committed, under the ſacred names of Religion, Liberty and Juſtice, the moſt ſhocking inſults on all three, overwhelmed King Nobility Church and State in one common deſolation, and eſtabliſhed on their ruins that very Deſpotiſm, the pretended fears of which firſt unſheathed their ſwords.

UPON the whole then, we ſee that religious principles of any kind had not near ſo large a ſhare in occaſioning the miſeries of the times in queſtion as is generally imagined, and the principles of the Goſpel none at all. The caſe is the ſame in moſt of the other diſſenſions that are uſually ſtiled Religious. To the account of human policy muſt be charged a great proportion of the guilt; to Ignorance, Superſtition, Hypocriſy and Enthuſiaſm, all the reſt. But were we even to allow the very reverſe of this to be true; were we to admit that Religion has been, through the miſtakes of weak, or the artifices of wicked men, the occaſion of all the evils falſly imputed to it, yet ſtill we ſhould not ſcruple to affirm, that the mild

and

and peaceful and benevolent genius of the Goſpel has actually appeared by its effects, that civil Society in general, and this Kingdom in particular, are upon the whole under infinite obligations to its divine and bleſſed influence on their moſt important concerns, have reaped from it more ſubſtantial benefits than from any other inſtitution upon earth, and found it by happy experience to be a Religion intirely worthy the gracious Father of the univerſe, and the Saviour of mankind. Put together all the exaggerated accounts of the miſeries ſpringing from religious contentions, and then oppoſe to them (what in cool and deliberate barbarity far exceeds them) the ſhocking carnage made in the human ſpecies, by the expoſure of infants, the gladiatorial ſhows, and the exquiſitely cruel uſage of ſlaves, allowed and practiſed in the times of Heatheniſm †. Theſe were legal, and eſtabliſhed, and conſtant methods of murdering and tormenting mankind, encouraged by the wiſeſt legiſlators, and affording amuſement to the tendereſt and moſt compaſſionate minds. Had

† Beſides the many other well known ſeverities exerciſed towards the ſlaves of the Ancients, there was a law at *Sparta*, called the *Cryptia*, which ordered them to be murdered in cold blood, whenever they increaſed ſo faſt as to give umbrage to the State. *Plutarch. in Lycurg.*— The ſame Author *(de Amore Prolis)* ſpeaks of the expoſure of infants as a very common practice; *Seneca* does the ſame, *de Irâ*, lib. i. c. 15. And *Lipſius* affirms, that the gladiatorial ſhows ſometimes coſt *Europe* twenty or thirty thouſand lives in a month, *Saturnal.* lib. i. c. 12.— Let it be duly conſidered what incredible numbers muſt have been deſtroyed by theſe execrable barbarities, continued, as they were, without intermiſſion, through a long courſe of years.

Chriſtianity

Chriſtianity done nothing more than brought into diſuſe the two former of theſe inhuman cuſtoms intirely, and the latter to a very great degree, it had juſtly merited the title of THE BENEVOLENT RELIGION; and it might with the ſtricteſt truth be ſaid, that *the Son of man came not to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them* *. But this is far from being all. Throughout the more enlightened parts of Chriſtendom, there prevails a gentleneſs of manners, widely different from the ferocity of the moſt civilized nations of Antiquity; and that liberality, with which every ſpecies of diſtreſs is relieved, both by private donations and public benefactions, even in ſome of the moſt bigotted countries of *Europe*, is a virtue as peculiar to the Chriſtian name, as it is eminently conducive to ſocial happineſs. As for ourſelves, in the nature of our civil conſtitution, in the extent of our freedom, in the ſecurity of our perſons and properties, in the temper of our laws, in the adminiſtration of juſtice, in public tranquillity, in domeſtic peace and comfort, in offices of mutual kindneſs and charity, we have a viſible and undeniable ſuperiority over the Ancients. To what then can this happy change in our circumſtances be owing? To Philoſophy (replies the Deiſt †) to mild and gentle Philoſophy, to the humane ſuggeſtions of Reaſon, and the improvement of the liberal Arts. Were then Reaſon, Philoſophy, and good Learning, utterly unknown

* Luke ix. 56.

† *Voltaire de la Tolerance*, ch. iv. p. 30, 34, 44.

in *Greece* and *Rome?* Were not theſe the very fountains of every thing that was ſublime and excellent in human Wiſdom and polite Literature, from whence they were diſtributed in the pureſt ſtreams over the reſt of the world, and deſcended to all ſucceeding ages? Did they not carry them to a degree of elegance and perfection, at which it is at leaſt doubtful whether the moderns have yet arrived, or ever will? And yet in theſe very places, at a time when both the ſeverer Sciences and the ſofter Arts were in their full ſtrength and maturity, it was then that all thoſe inhumanities, which are by Chriſtians held in the utmoſt horror, were publickly authoriſed, and that ambitious ferocious contentious ſanguinary diſpoſition, which is now in compariſon wholly ſubdued, univerſally prevailed. It was then that almoſt every civil government was a kind of military eſtabliſhment, was founded in violence, and maintained by it; that wars were begun wantonly, conducted fiercely, and terminated inhumanly; that a paſſion for martial atchievements, a luſt of empire, an inſatiable thirſt of glory and conqueſt, filled the world with bloodſhed and confuſion: it was then, that in the very beſt inſtitutions, the greateſt part of the ſubjects enjoyed no liberty at all, and what the reſt enjoyed was purchaſed frequently at the expence of their repoſe, their humanity, and a great part of thoſe ſocial comforts, which render Liberty truly valuable: it was then, that the courts of Judicature (at *Rome* more eſpecially) were inconceivably corrupt; that the power both of the Father and the Huſband were carried beyond all bounds of lenity and utility; that

divorces

divorces were allowed for the moſt trivial cauſes; that the education of children was unreaſonably ſevere and rigorous; that infants were ſacrificed to views of policy; that men were trained up to murder each other, for the entertainment of the ſpectators; that the happieſt ſtates were continually rent in pieces by the moſt violent diſſenſions, which were at length extinguiſhed, not by mutual conceſſions, but by mutual aſſaſſinations, by the entire annihilation of the oppoſite factions.

If then the utmoſt perfection of Philoſophy and the fine Arts was not able to tame the fierceneſs of ancient manners, nay, if they actually grew worſe in this and many other reſpects in proportion to the advancement of Learning and Politeneſs, to what elſe but Chriſtianity can it be owing, that ſcarce any traces of this univerſal barbarity now remain amongſt us? that in domeſtic ſociety, the eaſe and happineſs of each individual, even the very loweſt, is properly attended to; that weakneſs of ſex, tenderneſs of age, and humility of condition, inſtead of provoking inſult, generally attract pity and protection; that civil liberty is in our own country more firmly rooted, more equably diffuſed, more peaceably enjoyed; that juſtice is moſt uprightly and impartially adminiſtered; that the remoteſt provinces (which in heathen times groaned under the moſt mercileſs exactions and cruelties) are as ſecure from oppreſſion as the very ſeat of Government, and the meaneſt of the people as much under the protection of the laws, as the moſt rich and powerful;

that Monarchy, which, of all forms of government, is, if well adminiſtered, indiſputably the beſt, but which never could be made in any degree tolerable to the Ancients, is now found to be very conſiſtent with public happineſs; that the rage of univerſal empire is much abated, the inſolence of conqueſt tamed, and the frequency, duration and cruelty of wars greatly diminiſhed; that civil diſſenſions more rarely happen, are attended commonly with fewer circumſtances of inhumanity and horror, and have oftener proved favourable than fatal to Liberty; that even thoſe ſad diſtractions, which we are now called upon to lament, were "leſs diſtinguiſhed by "atrocious deeds, either of treachery or cruelty, than were "ever any inteſtine diſcords of ſo long continuance *;" and that the two happieſt changes which this or any other kingdom ever experienced, were effected with very little interruption of public tranquillity, and were eaſy tranſitions, not horrible convulſions. Compare all theſe amazing improvements in ſocial happineſs ſince the introduction of Chriſtianity, with the precepts and the doctrines of that Religion; conſider their natural tendency to produce what actually has been produced, and then ſay whether you can heſitate one moment in aſcribing theſe effects to the Goſpel, as their ſole, or at leaſt principal cauſe? What puts this matter beyond a doubt is, that in thoſe countries where the Chriſtian Revelation is yet unknown, the civil bleſſings enjoyed by Chriſtians are

* *Hume*'s Hiſtory, Quarto, vol. v. p. 337.

equally

equally unknown. The miſeries of their Anceſtors have deſcended to them with their ſuperſtitions, and bear a daily living teſtimony to the benevolence of our Religion. And it is no leſs remarkable and deciſive, that the degree of perfection, in which theſe advantages are enjoyed by any nation, is in general pretty nearly proportioned to the degree of purity in which the doctrines of the Goſpel are there profeſſed and taught. Where there is no Chriſtianity (for inſtance) there is no Liberty. Where the ſuperſtitions and corruptions of Popery have almoſt totally deſtroyed the ſimplicity of the Chriſtian Revelation, there too is Liberty much obſcured and depreſſed: where ſome of thoſe corruptions are thrown off, there ſome brighter gleams of liberty appear; where the eſtabliſhed Religion approaches neareſt to the native purity of the Goſpel, there too civil Liberty ſhines forth in its full luſtre, and is carried to a degree of perfection, beyond which human weakneſs will not perhaps ſuffer it to be advanced.

SINCE then, notwithſtanding all the diſadvantages under which the Goſpel has laboured, the many violent paſſions it had to ſtruggle with, and the variety of obſtacles that impeded its operation, it has nevertheleſs gradually and ſilently, yet effectually advanced the welfare of ſociety; What greater encouragement can there be to any people, and more eſpecially to ourſelves, who have ſo largely taſted of its civil benefits, to *ſeek firſt the Kingdom of* GOD *and his Righteouſneſs*, in a full aſſurance, founded not only on the natural conſequences of true piety and virtue, but

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on the promiſe of God himſelf, and in ſome meaſure on our own paſt experience, that if we do ſo, *all thoſe things* that are really neceſſary to ſocial happineſs, *ſhall be added to us?* It becomes therefore the duty, not only of every private Citizen, to make this beneficent Religion the rule of his life, and both by his converſation and example to ſpread the belief and practice of it as wide as poſſible, but of the Legiſlature itſelf, to give it all the countenance and protection and ſupport, which its infinite importance and utility to the Public demand. And it behoves thoſe, who, by ſerving up Infidelity to the Public in every ſhape, and blending it with the moſt pleaſing and popular ſubjects, Hiſtory, Poetry, Politics, and Romance, are continually endeavouring to ſhake the foundations of our Faith, and to weaken its hold on the minds of the people; it behoves them, I ſay, to conſider well how far it is conſiſtent with the character they all affect, that of benevolent men and good ſubjects, to attempt the ſubverſion of a Religion, to which the Government they live under owes the greateſt part of its Lenity, its Liberty and Stability, which overflows with love and tenderneſs for the whole human race, and whilſt it leads us to Heaven with one hand, gives us every thing that is truly valuable on earth with the other.] If from a miſapprehenſion or perverſion of its doctrines, great miſchiefs have formerly ariſen, what is the juſt and obvious inference from this? Not ſurely that we ought to caſt off *all* Religion, but that we ought to cultivate more aſſiduouſly *the true one*; ought to adhere the more cloſely to our own eſtabliſhed Church,

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which has utterly diſcarded all thoſe pernicious errors and corruptions, and to ſingular purity of doctrine adds a temper ſo truly Chriſtian, ſo perfectly mild and moderate, that it is not capable of producing the leaſt diſturbance in the State. Whatever harm miſguided zeal may have done in leſs enlightened times, we are now thoroughly ſenſible that the *ſervant of the* LORD *ought not to ſtrive, but ſhould be gentle to all, apt to teach, patient, in meekneſs inſtructing*, not by violence ſubduing, *ſuch as oppoſe themſelves* *. Under this perſuaſion, though we have the utmoſt reaſon to think our own mode of Worſhip and Church-government the moſt agreeable of any in the world to the intention of CHRIST and his Apoſtles, and the practice of the primitive ages, yet we are very far from imitating or wiſhing to imitate our miſtaken Forefathers, in forcing them on the ſcrupulous though erroneous conſciences of thoſe who are not willing to receive them. By happy experience we have learnt (what in former times, which afforded no example of it, men could never bring themſelves to believe) that Liberty of Conſcience, when not abuſed, is perfectly conſiſtent both with the good order of Government, and the welfare of the national Church; that Toleration to thoſe who diſſent, redounds not only to the honour, but to the peace and ſecurity of thoſe who conform; and that amidſt a great variety of religious ſentiments, we may ſtill be cemented together by mutual kindneſs and affection, may ſtill preſerve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, that truly Chris-

* 2 Tim. ii. 24.

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tian bond, which, linking together every heart, leaves every judgment free, and, from the ſeeming diſcord of many different parts, makes up the entire conſent and harmony of the whole.

From a Church profeſſing and teaching ſuch doctrines as theſe, the State has nothing to fear, but on the contrary, every thing to hope, which a pure, a peaceful, a benevolent, Religion can give. And let us not imagine, that the ſuperiority we boaſt in many reſpects over all other kingdoms, renders the aid of Religion unneceſſary to us. We call ourſelves a free, a commercial, a powerful Nation. It is true we are ſo. And if for theſe very reaſons we are not alſo virtuous and religious in proportion to thoſe advantages, we ſhall not only be a moſt ungrateful, but in a little time a moſt wretched, People. Every increaſe of Dominion, of Wealth, of Liberty, calls for a like increaſe of true Piety and Goodneſs. If theſe do not keep pace with the former, thoſe very bleſſings we ſo highly and juſtly prize, will be converted into curſes; our Liberty will degenerate into Licentiouſneſs, our Wealth will beget Luxury and Corruption, and the weight of our own Empire will overwhelm us. This has been the progreſs of many powerful kingdoms before us; and what reaſon have we to expect that we ſhall eſcape their fate, unleſs we avoid the vices that led to it? Deſpotiſm, it is ſaid, may be ſupported by fear *, pure Monarchy by

* *Monteſquieu l'Eſprit des Loix*, 12mo, vol. I. p. 37.

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the principle of honour; but it is univerſally agreed, that a free State can be upheld by nothing but virtue. How then is this virtue to be maintained? Among the Ancients, who had no religion that could purify the heart, the only preſervative of public and private virtue, and conſequently of liberty, that ever proved effectual was, POVERTY. So long as they continued indigent, they continued free; but no ſooner were Riches introduced, than Profligacy, Diſſenſion, Anarchy, Slavery, followed in quick ſucceſſion. What then is to be done in our own caſe? We are free, but we are alſo rich. We are enthuſiaſtically fond of our Trade; but that Trade, by pouring in upon us a profuſion of Wealth, has given Freedom a companion that has always proved her Deſtroyer. There is not in all antiquity a ſingle inſtance of any nation long preſerving its Liberty, with ſuch an extent of Territory, and ſuch a degree of Wealth, as we now enjoy. This is an alarming conſideration! But be of good courage. It is with the preſervation of wealthy nations as with the ſalvation of ſome wealthy individuals. *With men this is impoſſible, but with* GOD *all things are poſſible* *. By the divine aid of Chriſtianity, and by that only, Riches and Freedom may be made conſiſtent; and thus the higheſt degree of political happineſs, reſulting from ſo rare, yet ſo deſirable a union, may be produced. This is that heavenly antidote which the great Phyſician of our ſouls has given us, to counteract the fatal poiſon of Luxury, ſpringing from the increaſe of Commerce, and to check the pro-

* Matt. xix. 26.

greſs of Licentiouſneſs, ariſing from an inſatiable appetite for Liberty.

It may be thought perhaps, that theſe evils are yet very remote. Would to God they were ſo! Would to God that the ſtrongeſt ſymptoms of them were not too plainly ſeen in the Diſtreſs and Scarcity, occaſioned chiefly by an univerſal Profuſeneſs, and its neceſſary attendant Rapaciouſneſs, in every rank of life; in the diſpoſition ſhewn by the lower claſs of people, both at home and abroad, to ſet authority at defiance, and redreſs their own ſuppoſed wrongs by committing real injuries on others; in the general want of reſpect to Superiors, and of reverence to the Laws; in the inſults offered to our Religious, and through that to our Civil, Eſtabliſhment, by the writings of thoſe who moſt ſenſibly feel their indulgence, and in return would overthrow all Religion, or introduce a corrupt one; in the unbounded licence with which the meaſures of every Adminiſtration are indiſcriminately cenſured, the higheſt and moſt reſpectable Characters defamed, and the moſt innocent, and even laudable Intentions miſrepreſented; in the diviſions and animoſities amongſt the Great themſelves, the attention to perſonal intereſt, and private connections, the narrow views and partial motives which too often interfere with the care of the Community, and obſtruct that union of all the Great and Good, which every ſincere Friend to this Country moſt ardently deſires, and its neceſſities loudly call for!

INCONSIDERABLE as theſe diſorders may ſeem at preſent, a great part of them were formerly amongſt the beginnings of this Day's ſorrows, and if ſuffered to gain ground, may once more grow up, though not, we hope, into ſuch terrible, yet into very ſerious evils, and concurring with that enormous load of Debt which hangs over our heads, may plunge us into extreme diſtreſs. There is no need at leaſt to add to the weight of this great burden by our voluntary miſconduct, or to leſſen our ability to ſupport it, by weakening the vigour, impairing the dignity, lowering the credit, or contemning the authority of Government. It requires, on the contrary, our unanimous efforts, the joint exertion of every public and private virtue, and a chearful concurrence with every wiſe meaſure of Adminiſtration, to lighten ſo heavy a preſſure. All other methods to alleviate our preſent or guard againſt future diſtempers will be only palliatives. To effect a radical cure, we muſt go at once to the bottom of the complaint. We muſt begin with our own vices and extravagancies, muſt purify our hearts, ſubdue our paſſions, reſtrain our exceſſes, moderate our expences, and mortify *the luſt of the fleſh, the luſt of the eyes, and the pride of life* *.

WHOEVER ſeeks the Kingdom of GOD and his Righteouſneſs in the firſt place, will by neceſſary conſequence ſeek the good of his Country in the next, and his own

* 1 John ii. 16.

private emolument in the laſt. That very detachment from earthly things, which Chriſtianity enjoins, and which has moſt abſurdly and injuriouſly been repreſented as weakening our connection with civil Society, and extinguiſhing all zeal for our Country *, is, on the contrary, the ſtrongeſt cement of our union with the body politic, and the firmeſt baſis of true patriotiſm. The grand obſtacle to all public ſpirit, is ſome mean and ſelfiſh paſſion, ſome ſordid intereſt, ſome contemptible purſuit, which keeps its wretched maſter, or, more properly ſpeaking, its abject ſlave, confined within its own narrow circle, out of which it will not ſuffer him to ſtir one ſtep to ſave a family from diſtreſs, or a nation from deſtruction. From this vile bondage, Chriſtianity reſcues him with a high hand, burſts aſunder the chains that rivet him down to the earth, deſtroys the dominion of appetite, the attractions of pleaſure, the ſlumbers of indolence, and ſets him at liberty to go where Duty, Juſtice, and Humanity call. It teaches him at one and the ſame time, that *temperance in all things* †, which is calculated to prevent, and that benevolence which is neceſſary to relieve, the diſtreſſes of the public. It commands him to love his neighbour, that is, his fellow-citizens, as himſelf, to ſeek their welfare in preference to his own, where they happen to interfere ‡, and, if it be neceſſary, even to lay down his life for their ſakes ‖. It enjoins him to

* *Rouſſeau. Contract. Social.* p. 195, 196.

† 1 Cor. ix. 25. ‡ 1 Cor. x. 24. ‖ 1 John iii. 16.

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be ſubject to the *powers that be*, to the actual eſtabliſhed Government, to that legal authority, which is the grand ſupport of civil Liberty, not only for wrath, but alſo for conſcience-ſake: it links him to his brother-Chriſtians and brother-Subjects, by the profeſſion of the ſame faith, and a participation of the ſame common worſhip; and, by thus adding the ties of Religion to thoſe of civil Union, attaches him in the moſt effectual manner to the Community. It inſpires him, in ſhort, with every ſentiment that is noble, liberal and diſintereſted, with that holy and ſincere and rational love of his Country, which, ſpringing from the love of GOD and the love of man, knows no other bounds but what they preſcribe, and acts of courſe within a circumference wide enough to take in the real intereſts of any people, without invading (what ought never on any pretence to be invaded) the common rights of mankind. Beyond this, it is Enthuſiaſm, not Patriotiſm, to go.

IF a conduct formed on theſe principles, and theſe are the genuine principles of the Goſpel, will not make a nation great and proſperous, it is hard to ſay what will. The power of Chriſtianity to advance private happineſs, many thouſands of individuals can from their own heart-felt conviction bear witneſs to. If its influence on public welfare is not ſo readily ſeen and acknowledged, it is only becauſe no kingdom upon earth has ever yet given it a fair trial. Let us then be the firſt to make the experiment thoroughly and effectually. We need be in no

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pain about the event. If God is to be believed, it will amply reward our labour, and anſwer our moſt ſanguine expectations. The fatal conſequences of corrupt religion falling in with civil diſſenſions, this Day's ſolemnity will bring to our remembrance; may we from our own experience learn the inconceivably happy effects of pure Religion, co-operating with a well-conſtituted and well-ordered Government!

FINIS.